

**City of Coral Gables City Commission Meeting**  
**Agenda Item B – Public Comments**  
**September 22, 2020**  
**Virtual Meeting**  
**405 Biltmore Way, Coral Gables, FL**

**City Commission**

**Mayor Raul Valdes-Fauli**  
**Vice Mayor Vince Lago**  
**Commissioner Jorge Fors, Jr.**  
**Commissioner Pat Keon**  
**Commissioner Michael Mena**

**City Staff**

**City Manager, Peter Iglesias**  
**City Attorney, Miriam Ramos**  
**City Clerk, Billy Urquia**

**Public Speaker(s)**

**Jack Thompson**  
**Mark Trowbridge**  
**Tom Espina**  
**Michelle Drugger**  
**Rip Holmes**

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Agenda Item B [9:20 a.m.]  
Public Comments

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: And now we go onto public comments section of the meeting and I know that Mr. John Thompson wishes to speak. Billy, I don't know who is on or who wishes to speak.

City Clerk Urquia: So, we have him on Mr. Mayor. We are asking him to unmute right now and he should be coming on.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Very good.

Mr. Thompson: Can you hear me?

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Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Yes, we can hear you.

Mr. Thompson: Thank you for this opportunity to address the Commission. My name is Jack Thompson, a resident of Coral Gables for 38 years, my wife and I reside at 5721 Riviera Drive. Two things – Number one, I wish to thank the Mayor for correctly identifying at a recent Commission meeting that Commissioner Lago improperly used City stationery with the City Seal for personal correspondence. The City Attorney stated this is okay with her, but a specific Florida Attorney General opinion that I provided her and all of you states, it is not okay. Even more remarkably the Miami City Mayor has placed his personal correspondence on Coral Gables City stationery featuring the City Seal. So, I would ask what's next? Are unelected private citizens allowed to send out letters on official City stationery? Such freelancing by Gables Commissioners must stop. Secondly, and frankly more importantly, by a magnitude of about 100, I encourage the City to get serious finally, about enforcing its and the county's mask orders. Last week the Director of the CDC stated under oath that masks like this are the single best way to find Covid, even more effective than a vaccine. Today the national positivity rate for Covid stands at 5 percent. Florida's positivity rate on the other hand is twice that, 10 percent. The British Prime Minister is this moment in front of Parliament announcing that a second wave of infections which was predicted must now be met with a restoration of Covid suppression measures. Just last night the NFL levied \$1 million in fines because coaches of teams refuse to wear their mask on the sidelines. The public records I have obtained from Chief Hudak prove that the mask order is not being aggressively enforced in Coral Gables by the Coral Gables Police. This Commission and Chief Hudak would, I guess, have us believe that he and you are smarter than the NFL, the CDC, and the British Parliament. Folks, if you don't direct the Chief of Police finally to enforce the mask orders, supposedly imposed by the county and by this city, then I'll be back here in a month to tell you, I told you so. And that is one thing I don't want to do. People are dying because people aren't wearing masks, and our Police Department can drive, send a unit around the Granada Golf Course down Riviera Drive where I live and other public places and find that there are people passing one another not maintaining social distancing and not wearing masks. This is a matter of life and death folks, and its got to stop.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much Mr. Thompson, and you will see all of us here in the days and in the room wearing orange Coral Gables masks. I will buy one of these masks from the City of Coral Gables and personally give it to you as a gift from the City Commission. Thank you for your intervention. We all agree that masks are very, very important and anytime you want to address us you are welcome to do so. Thank you, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson: I appreciate it, but what are we going to do about not wearing masks in Coral Gables that the Police Department is not enforcing, and therefore encouraging people not to wear masks.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: I don't think anybody is encouraging people not to wear masks, Mr. Thompson.

Mr. Thompson: They are to the extent they are not enforcing the law.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Mr. Thompson. Thank you very much.  
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Mr. Thompson: Thank you.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, next you have Mr. Mark Trowbridge who would like to speak.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Mr. Trowbridge you're on.

Mr. Trowbridge: Thank you very much Mr. Mayor. Its great to be with all of you this morning. I just wanted to let you know that our Chamber has moved to a new location in the last ten days. We are now at our new home at 201 Alhambra Circle, Suite 100, and so I wanted to reach out to you as members of our elected body and Commission and say thank you for all of your support. I want to thank our City Manager and his entire team for helping us get through the permit process and the buildout process. We now are here in our new home after 15 years on Catalonia, and so, we are looking forward to being sort of back to our roots where we were for many, many years in the downtown and consider our new location on main and main of the business community. So, on behalf of our Board, our entire leadership and of course our team here at the Chamber, we are thrilled to be at our new location. Look forward to serving the community for many more years to come. We celebrate 95 years anniversary in October, and we grew up with the City of Coral Gables. We share George Merrick as our founders, and most importantly, we have always enjoyed a wonderful relationship with our city and several of our city brethren sit on our Board; Commissioner Pat Keon sits on our Board, as well as Julian Perez, and we want to also thank our Mayor for his wonderful State of the City Beautiful Address that he gave last week, and our Chamber was honored to have him speak before our group, as well as bestow upon him on the occasion of his final State of the City Beautiful Address, a lifetime membership in our Chamber. Thank you, Mr. Mayor, Mr. Vice Mayor, members of the Commission and of course all of our leadership, City Manager Iglesias, City Attorney Ramos, and of course our Clerk Mr. Urquia. So, thank you very much and come by and visit us. We have a beautiful new welcome center to welcome all of our visitors, our residents, and of course our members. Thank you, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Mark. Thank you very, very much for what you do and what the Chamber does for our city. Its very significant and very important for us.

City Clerk Urquia: Mr. Mayor, next we have Tom Espina, who would like to speak as well.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Who?

City Clerk Urquia: Tom Espina.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay. Mr. Espina.

Mr. Espina: Mr. Mayor, Commissioners, thank you for your time. I appreciate the just very brief comments. I reside in the North Gables, by the Coral Gables Women's Center on 20 Venetia Avenue. My family and I have been here for about seven or eight years now. Coming from working in city government under Mayor Bloomberg's administration. And I love what the city has done in regard to Miracle Mile. It's absolutely fantastic and I applaud all of you. I have a very simple  
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request. I love what the transportation needs are, and we have a special needs child and we understand that parking on the Mile is sometimes we hard; and we love the trolley, and we love the Freebie service. However, there have been some new buildings that are up and around this area, and the Freebie service is limited to the North Gables area. It only goes up to a certain distance that is probably about a quarter mile short of Southwest 8<sup>th</sup> Street, which is the northern part of Coral Gables, between LeJeune and Douglas, which of course our home is, since some of the newer buildings. So, it's a very simple request, which is see if the Freebie service could actually reach up to the northern most part as our population here grows up in this area and begins to beautify, we would love to see if that request could be made. And I don't know what the process would be from this point, but I would like to put the request on record. And I thank you for your time everyone; and one other quick comment just to piggyback on what the previous gentleman said. I do have a friend who works at...which is based here in Ponce de Leon. They actually did go to a dinner to invite a new member who was not wearing his mask and did receive a ticket. So, he will beg to differ that they are not being enforced. Thank you for your time.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Mr. Espina. I don't know if you are aware that the trolley does serve 8<sup>th</sup> Street, it does go up to 8<sup>th</sup> Street, but we will look into having the Freebie and we will study that. Thank you very, very much for your comments.

Mr. Espina: Thank you sir.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Anybody else Mr. Urquia?

City Clerk Urquia: Yes, Mr. Mayor, next you have Michelle Drugger.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Okay, Ms. Drugger.

Ms. Drugger: Good morning. Thank you for hearing my comments. We have two homes in Coral Gables, 1101 Palermo Avenue and 1502 Zoretta Avenue. I'm very engaged in sustainability initiatives in our community, including four national awards, three from Homeland Security and one from the Department of Education. And I wanted to ask if we could look into trying to create a reusable container kiosk for takeout. This is part of the plastic that I have accumulated during the Covid process. I try really hard. I have a composter; I recycle my Styrofoam to Publix, plastic bags, but I really would like to see us consider trying to create a usable kiosk system like they have across campuses for restaurants on Miracle Mile. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very, very much ma'am. Mr. Urquia.

City Clerk Urquia: That's it, Mr. Mayor.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: That's it. Thank you very much for everybody who participated, and I think it worked. We've had more participation in the public comment section by this means than we've ever had, so that's very good.

[Public Comments Resumed]

Commissioner Mena: Sir, Mr. Mayor, if I may, I just wanted to address something very, very briefly, but I think its important. Mr. Thompson came on and he addressed the seriousness with which the city is taking Covid-19. Unfortunately, sometimes people present partial facts and statistics and I think its important to always have facts on the table if you are going to engage in a discussion about those types of issues. He cited to a national rate of 5 percent and a State of Florida, 10 percent. What he didn't mention, and I've asked the Chief for these numbers, at the county I'm told that the 14-day average right now is 4.55; I'm told that the daily is at 3.67; and I'm told that throughout the entirety as a percent of population in the City of Coral Gables the number is 5.1. So, I think when we look to have a city has managed and our residents have been accountable, because I think that the most important thing in dealing with this issue is individual accountability and taking care of oneself. And I think our residents and our city by and large have done an excellent job of that, as have our businesses, and I think the statistics bear that out. And I don't think that statistics about how many citations the police have given are indicative of how the city is doing with this process. The entire thing is an unprecedented situation. I think we moved heaven and earth to do a lot of good things and to do what we think is right, and I think the stats show that by and large we've done a good job and that our residents, again, have been excellent in terms of personal accountability. Yes, you may see somebody walking on a sidewalk occasionally with their family by themselves, who may not have a mask on in that moment, sure, and that's a nice anecdotal fact, if what you want to do is sling mud at people, but if you want to have a real conversation about how the city is doing, I encourage people to go to the Miami-Dade County Daily Dashboard, look at the actual statistics and look at what's actually going on. Even further, I encourage people to get out and about and go about living their lives, supporting our businesses. My daughters go to school every day, I go to work every day, we take every precaution possible, but we continue with our lives, as a country and as a community, and I encourage everybody to keep doing that. So, I just want to address that, because I think its really important to stop with the fearmongering and the use of random statistics in order to paint a picture that simply not accurate, and not consistent with reality. Thank you.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you very much for this Commissioner Mena for setting the record straight. We have one more person who wishes to speak on the public comments, which is Mr. Rip Holmes, our own Rip Holmes. Mr. Holmes be very brief please.

Mr. Holmes: Thanks so much. I was going to put my coat on, but no time.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Put your mask on.

Vice Mayor Lago: You're fine, don't worry.

Mr. Holmes: I'm very grateful to you. You know, I'm just getting back in the swing of things, so I'm really not going to make any substantive comments. I'm really just want to thank you all for allowing me and allowing all of the citizens to participate to adjust to this new world that we live in. So, you all have done great work on this. I think that your ability to adapt is really quite

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impressive and astounding. I will jazz it up a little bit here, so get ready. I know that all of us are very concerned about the environment. I know that some of the other public comments, so put on your seatbelts here. I'm looking into whether or not its possible that there is such a thing as free energy, and of course I wouldn't say this in a public forum unless I felt that there is substantial evidence of it. So, wouldn't that be nice. That could be the end of our environmental problems because there is no more need for petroleum. I leave you with that. Thank you very much.

Vice Mayor Lago: Thank you Rip.

Mayor Valdes-Fauli: Thank you Mr. Holmes. Thank you very much.